A METHOD OF CONVERSING WITH GOD

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A Method of Conversing with God

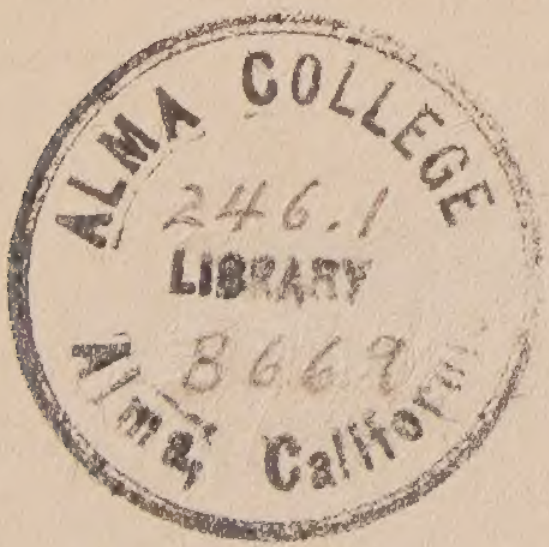
Michel Boutauld, S.J.

A Method of Conversing with God

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
I. W. OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS,
AND PRINTED IN LONDON IN 1692

Revised and Edited by W. A. PHILLIPSON

THIRD EDITION



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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

THIS little work, written in French by F. Boutauld, S.J., in the seventeenth century, was translated into English not long after its publication. It certainly met with a favourable reception from the scattered and persecuted Catholics of England, into whose souls it carried light and consolation during the dark days two centuries ago, for it had passed through two editions before 1693. The translator, whose initials—J. W.—appear on the title page, was a Father of the Society of Jesus—a convert to the Catholic Faith. He was no other than *Sir John Warner*. 'Sir John Warner, Bart., alias Clare, John, Father, a native of Parham, one mile from Framlingham, Suffolk, born 1640; created a baronet by King Charles II., July 16, 1660, in reward for his loyalty and faithful service. On June 7, 1659, he married Trevor Hanmer,

daughter of Sir Thomas Hanmer, Bart., of Hanmer Hall, county Flint, who was created a baronet by James I., July 18, 1620. Sir John and Lady Warner were converted to the Catholic Faith in 1664. Lady Warner and her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Warner, Sir John's sister, were received into the Church on June 23, and Sir John on July 6 following. They mutually agreed to separate and consecrate themselves to the higher service of God in religion. Father Warner entered the Society, under the name of John Clare, at Watten, January 10, or March 24, 1665, and was professed of the three vows August 15, 1667, and afterwards of the four vows February 2, 1683. He was ordained Priest 1671. In 1674 he was Socius to the Master of Novices at Watten, and Spiritual Father. In 1680 and 1683 he was in Paris, acting as Procurator of the Province. On November 25, 1685, he was declared Rector of Watten and Master of Novices, and on December 4, 1689, Provincial, holding that office until February 16, 1694. He then became Confessor at Watten, and Consultor of the Province. In the next year he was appointed Spiritual Father, and died in that office March 21, 1705, æt. 60.

'Sir John and Lady Warner had two

daughters, Catherine, born 1660, entered amongst the English Benedictine Nuns at Dunkirk, and died there 1696, æt. 36. She took the name of Mary Agnes in religion. Susan, born 1662, entered the same convent 1685, took the name of Ignatia, and died at Dunkirk 1711, æt. 49. Lady Warner and Miss Elizabeth Warner both entered the Order of Poor-Clares (*at Gravelines*). Lady Warner died January 26, 1670; she took the name of Clare in religion. Sir John renounced his estates to his brother Francis (also a convert to the Catholic Faith) in October, 1664. Francis subsequently resolved to enter religion among the Carthusians at Nieuport, but was accidentally drowned off the very port, *en route* to the monastery, April 3, 1667. Sir John Warner then resettled the estates upon his only surviving brother, Edward Warner, a London merchant.' (Foley's 'Records of the Society of Jesus,' vol. vii., part ii., pp. 817, 818.)

The Lady Abbess, Ann Bedingfield, to whom the translation was dedicated by Father Warner, was one of eleven sisters, all nuns. Two of them were at the English Augustinian Convent at Bruges, where Lady Hamilton, the only one of the sisters who was married, also became a nun in the days

of her widowhood, and was trained in the religious life *by her own daughter*, Sister Lucy, who was Novice Mistress; and she vowed obedience to her niece, another Bedingfield, who was Prioress.

W. A. PHILLIPSON.

BIRCHINGTON-ON-SEA, 1910.

THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY

TO

THE VERY REVEREND MOTHER, ANN BEDINGFIELD,

ABBESS OF THE ENGLISH POOR-CLARES
AT GRAVELING

MADAM,

I have a long time wished for an opportunity of testifying to the world the sense I have of my obligation to you and your community for your many favours to me and mine. But had not gratitude required any return I could make, justice would have exacted this, since this second edition owes its being to your liberal contribution. Please, therefore, accept what is already your own, and what, indeed, were not worth presenting to you did you not make it so by your approval, which I do not wonder at, since all are pleased to read what

they delight to practise. And there can be nothing but the constant union and conversation you have with God (of which this treatise is but a faint idea) that is able to produce the marvellous cheerfulness wherewith you suffer those austerities you have undertaken for His love, and which all who converse with you wonder at, regarding it as a kind of standing miracle that your tender sex—seeing that birth and education had not inured you to such hardships as you daily undergo—should be able to bear them, especially with such a cheerfulness that it even animates those who converse with you to follow your example. They behold, indeed, your mortifications; but could they have a knowledge of the sacred unction wherewith the Holy Ghost sweetens them during your pious conversations with Him, they would no longer wonder at your cheerfulness in suffering, but would be grieved not to suffer also, and would desire as earnestly as St. Teresa did 'either to suffer or to die,' which is a most convincing proof of love. Wherefore, if they desire to know how they may obtain the happiness which they admire and you enjoy, this treatise will teach them; and if they practise what it teaches, I promise them they will experience the same happi-

ness. Wherefore, in those pious entertainments between your Spouse and yourselves, be pleased to beg of Him, both for the reader and myself, such a faithful imitation of your example as may afford us the like consolations, whereby you will infinitely add to the many obligations you have already conferred upon,

Madam,

Your most humble and
obedient servant,

I. W.

CONTENTS

PAGE

INTRODUCTION - - - - - 11

CHAPTERS

I. In what this conversation consists - 12

II. That God is everywhere - - 14

III. God is at all times present - - 16

IV. That God is most particularly present to us when we are so to Him - - 17

V. That God makes Himself ignorant of what we do not impart to Him - 19

VI. God condescends to our weakness in permitting us to seek consolation from creatures, that, finding none in them, we may more earnestly turn to Him - 21

VII. It is not displeasing to God to relate our imperfections to Him - - - 22

VIII. How we are to lay open our daily infirmities before Almighty God - 23

IX. How to make your applications to God in ordinary doubts and difficulties - 27

X. He is not displeased when we complain to Him of Himself. In what manner we may do it - - - - 29

CHAPTER PAGE

XI. We are to represent the afflictions of others to God as well as our own - 31

XII. We are to have recourse to God no less in prosperity than in adversity - 34

XIII. Our imperfections in our devotions ought not to hinder a confident recourse to Him - - - 37

XIV. How multiplicity of business is no hindrance to this conversation - 39

XV. The greater familiarity you use with God, the more pleasing it is to Him 42

XVI. When particular reverence is to be shown - - - - 45

XVII. How to converse with God concerning Himself - - - - 46

XVIII. How to treat with Him of His Birth and Passion - - - - 47

XIX. How to converse with God concerning the sins of our past life - - 48

XX. In what manner we are to treat with God in scruples and fears of our salvation, or anything else - - 53

XXI. How God, whilst we speak to Him, silently speaks to our hearts - 57

A METHOD OF CONVERSING WITH GOD

'Non habet amaritudinem conversatio illius, nec tædium convictus illius.'

'His conversation hath no bitterness, nor His company any tediousness.'—WISD. viii. 16.

INTRODUCTION

OUR conversations with one another, though necessary for the entertainment of our minds, are subject to many drawbacks, or, at least, are liable to two troublesome accidents. The one is that, ordinarily, they displease us and become painful and insupportable, there being nothing that wearies us sooner or becomes more tedious than to be obliged to hearken to and entertain others. The other is still worse: that when these conversations please us, they are generally reprehensible, and most commonly we return with

wounded consciences, and such imperfections as we carried not with us. Conversation with God is free from these dangers ; neither sin nor wearisomeness accompanies it. Innocence and joy are the constant companions of this spiritual happiness.

If you desire to know it by your own experience, do what the Holy Ghost and the Divine Wisdom inspire in their own words, which I am about to lay before you, and regulate yourself according to the examples they invite you to copy.

CHAPTER I

IN WHAT THIS CONVERSATION CONSISTS

God loves you : love Him. His delight is to converse with you : let yours be to converse with Him, and to spend your time, as you will spend your eternity, in His delightful company. Accustom yourself to speak familiarly and confidently to Him, as to a friend ; and reflect that it is an error and weakness of our blinded nature not to be free in His presence, and only to appear before Him as slaves trembling with shame and fear before a Prince.

You are not asked by ecstatic prayer, or

by a great effort of your imagination, to form in your mind an image of His Adorable Personality, and then, prostrate in spirit before It, to forget yourself and your domestic affairs, and spend the day in contemplating and praising His infinite greatness.

No; we speak here only of a familiar intercourse, and desire nothing else but that, without quitting your ordinary avocations, you conduct yourself towards God as you are wont to do towards those who love you and whom you love. He is present with you as they are. Speak to Him as you would to them of your affairs, of your desires. Make known to Him your hopes and fears, and do it with confidence and an open heart; for reserve and silence are very displeasing to Him in His saints. The soul that has nothing to say to Him is like the little sister of the Sunamitess—not yet of age to be of the number of His spouses and to be tenderly loved by Him.

One of the first lessons of the spiritual life is that God, Who is almighty and the most to be feared of all masters when He commands, desires to be treated as the most familiar friend when He loves. And during His mystical communings with His chosen ones, the least of all creatures is not too

little or too contemptible in His sight, unless she has not yet learnt the manner of conversing with Him heart to heart, and amorously discovering to Him her most hidden thoughts.

True it is that He ought always to be sovereignly revered ; but when He does you the favour to visit you, and by an interior movement of your soul makes you sensible of His presence, the greatest honour He requires from you is to entertain and discourse with Him, as with one you love, freely, confidently, and tenderly.

CHAPTER II

THAT GOD IS EVERYWHERE

THE Prophet tells us that, to receive this honour, God does not wait till you come to Him, but as soon as He perceives that you desire to call Him He prevents you, and presents Himself to you with His hands filled with graces and with remedies for all the ailments you are wont to complain of. He only waits till you speak to Him to make you sensible that He is always near you, and ready to hear and impart consolation to you. Whereupon take notice that though God is

everywhere, and in all creatures throughout the world, by the extent of His immensity and by the operations of His power as Creator, there are two places in which He dwells as in His own home, and which He makes choice of as His favourite abodes: the one is the empyrean heaven where He is present by the emanations of His glory, which He communicates to the angels and saints; the other is upon earth, in the souls of the humble and predestined, where He is present by His grace and by the operations of the Holy Ghost, who restores to them the ancient paradise in their solitude. *Dwelling in eternity*, says one prophet, and *inhabiting in a humble and contrite heart*, says another. God dwells on high in the sublimity of eternity, and at the same time on earth below, in the solitudes of saints—in their caves, hermitages, and cells—where He passes the whole day conversing familiarly with them. *What joys! what heavenly consolations!* says Job, reflecting upon the former happy years of his conversation with God, *when God was secretly in my tabernacle, when the Omnipotent was with me.* In a word He is with you, O devout soul, as an inseparable and ever faithful companion.

CHAPTER III

GOD IS AT ALL TIMES PRESENT

OTHERS have hours of separation; there is no separation from God. All times are suitable to make holy love to Him. *When the sun retires*, says Solomon, *He retires not.* In the night He remains by your pillow to entertain you in the silent hours by His secret inspirations, and to help you to take a holy and calm repose amid the sweetnesses and celestial pleasures of this interior conversation.

He is present also when you wake in the morning, that He may hear from your mouth a word of confidence, and become the depository of your first cares each day. And since He fails not to be present when you wake, fail not on your part to look upon Him, and to stretch out your arms to embrace Him. Tell Him, with His beloved spouse in the Canticles, how your thoughts were taken up with Him in the night; what anguish you suffered through His absence; what tears you shed when you thought of your ingratitude that constrained Him to give ear to His justice and to depart from

you. Say with her: I longed for Thee; I ran after Thee in the deserts, where I saw nothing but darkness; but *in my spirit and from the bottom of my heart I will rejoice in the morning to find Thee.* Doubt not, O Divine Saviour, but that I am Thine, since Thou seest that the first motion of my heart on awakening is to rejoice in the happy tidings that Thou still lovest me, and art not so far from me as my faults have merited and my fears had imagined.

CHAPTER IV

THAT GOD IS MOST PARTICULARLY PRESENT TO US WHEN WE ARE SO TO HIM

No, devout soul, He is not far off: He is where you are. There is nothing in this world so near to you as He, your inseparable Lover. But take care you forget not that He is so—as do the greater part of mankind—and let no day or hour pass without beholding Him, thinking of Him, or speaking to Him. Entertain Him with some discourse. If you have any devotion, neither matter nor words will be wanting. Tell Him of yourself, of your family, and what you would tell a friend who came to visit you. Almighty as

He is, He looks upon what you tell Him as a thing of importance, because He loves you, and because love makes all your interests His own.

Regard Him not as a King who contemns a soul which has not kingly thoughts and is unable to entertain Him with weighty matters; or as one who will not condescend to hearken to your household affairs, or to what passes in the conscience of an insignificant creature.

St. Chrysostom says that *the occupation of God in heaven and upon the throne of His kingdom is to think of the angels and saints, and of the great design of His heavenly wisdom.* But when He is with you, when He comes into your abode, His only thought is of you; His providence and love are centred on your particular welfare. When He is with you and you are alone with Him, He is God (if I may so speak) for you alone; He is omnipotent, only to help you; He is all goodness and bounty, only to be loved by you, to draw you to confide in and love Him, and to afford you an opportunity of telling Him your afflictions, your anxieties for those who depend upon you, and that you may manifest the interior of your soul to Him. With love and sincerity tell Him all.

Reveal your ways unto the Lord. Seek His guidance in them, and make known all your counsels to Him.

CHAPTER V

THAT GOD MAKES HIMSELF IGNORANT OF WHAT WE DO NOT IMPART TO HIM

TELL me not that He already knows all you can say, because He is God and knows all things. Remember that by the law of His Divine Wisdom He will have all things that He knows pass as unknown to Him, without approving them, pleasing Himself in them, or guiding them to a happy ending, unless you yourself make them known to Him. There are tears poured forth abundantly in His presence, yet He sees them not. Such are the tears of insincere penitents. There are those, too, whom He avers He knows not. *Verily I say unto you, I know you not.* There are affairs, also, He is ignorant of, and they are your own, when you say nothing to Him of them. Your silence, which hides them from Him, makes them as unknown to Him ; and so He withholds His blessing from them, and they do not succeed. When you relate your troubles and dissatis-

factions to men, and say nothing to God, they know what you say, but God knows nothing of it.

God, great and omniscient as He was, knew not—that is, He would not know—that Lazarus was sick until St. Mary Magdalen told Him. You are indisposed; you are afflicted and pursued by your creditors; you are engaged in some business of importance, and need the counsel and assistance of a powerful friend. Our Saviour knows nothing of all this. If you would have it come to His knowledge, He must know it from yourself. It is a secret law His love prescribes to Him, and which He will not fail to observe. Wherefore, devout soul, be no longer silent in His presence. As soon as any trial or affliction befalls you, with humility and reverence make your complaint to Him. If your confidence be great, it is not necessary to beg His assistance in express terms. It sufficeth with St. Mary Magdalen to present your affliction before His eyes, that He may see it. *Behold, O Lord, how I am afflictea!* He delights to behold an afflicted heart and to comfort it. Reveal your heart to Him, and let Him see all the disquiets and bitterness within it. Manifest to Him all your thoughts troubled by fear and sadness. I

am filled with bitterness, my heart is drowned in grief. Behold me lost and overwhelmed in an abyss of misery. Dangers and darkness surround me. But I need say nothing, for Thy mercy sees my grief and tears, and all my hope is in Thee. Ask Thy mercy, O my God, what it ought to do. Ask Thy love the same, and then do what Thou wilt.

CHAPTER VI

GOD CONDESCENDS TO OUR WEAKNESS IN PERMITTING US TO SEEK CONSOLATION FROM CREATURES, THAT, FINDING NONE IN THEM, WE MAY MORE EARNESTLY TURN TO HIM

God is not angry, as I have said elsewhere, that in the hour of trouble you address yourself to creatures to be comforted by them. But when they have neither the power nor will to assist you, it is His pleasure that you come and make your complaint to Him, and, in His arms, blame their weakness and ingratitude. My friends have nothing but words; to Thee, therefore, O my Divine Saviour, I come to manifest my pain and to address my tears. And do not only make complaint of the things that trouble you, but

as soon as you receive tidings that please you, and cause hope and joy to spring up in your heart, do what fidelity and friendship require—run to Him whom you love, and Who awaits you. Tell Him the news, and add that it is your greatest comfort that His love and fatherly bounty prove that He is pleased with you. 'Wherefore my heart rejoiceth and my tongue exulteth. I will rejoice in God my Saviour, and sing to Him because He hath bestowed good things upon me.'

CHAPTER VII

IT IS NOT DISPLEASING TO GOD TO RELATE OUR IMPERFECTIONS TO HIM

THERE is another mark of confidence that greatly pleases this dear and loving Spouse—to trust Him with the knowledge of your faults, even before you approach the tribunal of penance. Come and declare to this loving confidant what has befallen you. Say with David, *I have sinned exceedingly, and have done very foolishly.* My God, I have spoken indiscreetly; I have done an unworthy deed. I know not what blindness shut my eyes and caused me to fall. In truth I am very much

ashamed of it and afflicted for it. But what troubles me most of all, and renders me inconsolable, is that Thou art offended. Nevertheless, if I have been less prudent, Thou art not less merciful, or less sensible of my tears. I behold compassion in Thine eyes, where I see Thy wonted bounty. Methinks I feel that love in Thy heart which is the joy and comfort of my life. Look and make experiment of it Thyself, and Thou wilt find that, notwithstanding my ingratitude, the flames of Thy charity are not extinguished, and that Thou art to-day what Thou wert from all eternity—sweet and gentle and plenteous in mercy.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW WE ARE TO LAY OPEN OUR DAILY INFIRMITIES BEFORE ALMIGHTY GOD

As regards the slight and ordinary faults that happen often and almost every hour, beg of Him that He would not forget what He knows better than you—to wit, that you are a poor sinner, and, like an infant, are subject to continual falls, though His fatherly goodness will not permit Him to be angry with you. Represent to Him that

a son and heir of tender age—the hope and darling of the family—is not less pleasing to his mother when he falls than when he stands on his little feet, but the contrary; for then it is that she takes him up and more tenderly cherishes him. Say that it is the nature of stepmothers to be angry or correct their little children because they fall. A true and loving mother, whose name he bears, no sooner sees her child fall down than she runs to help him up with motherly affection, and instead of angry threats, clasps him to her bosom, soothes and caresses him, and endeavours by love and kisses to assuage his pain and stop the torrent of his infant tears.

Great God! Thou callest me Thy little one, whom Thou holdest on Thy knees, or leadest by the hand to teach me to walk. Behold what I am, and when I fall, see what Thou shouldst be, and what Thy goodness demands of Thee. It is true, my most dear Father, and even this very day and in Thy presence, notwithstanding my repeated promises and resolutions, I have fallen into my daily and wonted imperfections; yet be not angry with me. I have good reason to cry and be afflicted—this belongs to me. But it belongs to Thee, my

Beloved, to give me Thy hand to help me up; to take me into Thy arms; to dry my tears; to dissipate my fears and troubles, and to assure me that Thou still lovest me, and dost not cease to be my God.

I do not deny that Thou hast much reason to complain that after so many confessions made, so many pardons and favours granted, Thou seest me fall into such frequent relapses. Yet methinks Thou hast a great deal of reason to excuse me in these unavoidable weaknesses, or, at least, if Thou art angry or displeased with them, to let Thine anger fall upon my parents, who conceived me in ignorance, and gave me their sin as part of my very being.

Vouchsafe, Divine Redeemer, to regard what is in me, what I am, what a heart has been bestowed upon me, and what blood has been made use of to form a creature that ought to be pure and sinless as an angel. As soon as I sprang out of nothing Thou refusedst me—what is most holy—Thy grace, without which I was born. My parents gave me only of their own—what was most sullied.

I received of Thee a soul which immediately was infected with sin before it was at my own disposal, and of them a body

already tainted with corruption and many vicious inclinations. Since, then, I became so miserable without my actual concurrence, there seemeth to be some reason why Thou shouldst pardon the imperfections that naturally flow from so bad a source.

I should be to blame, notwithstanding, if I thought that Thine infinite sanctity ought not to regard my failings with displeasure. I am displeased with them myself, and suffer sorrowful regret and remorse for them. But I will tell Thee what I do to comfort myself, and what, in my opinion, Thou shouldst do to appease Thine anger, and to have towards me no other feelings than of compassion—no other designs than of mercy.

For my part, O my God, at the very moment I sin I look upon Thee as Thou wert on Mount Calvary, where Thou didst think only of pardon, and of seeking after the sinners of the whole world, to wash them in Thy most Precious Blood. This it is that I behold, and that makes me run to Thee. O Adorable Mercy, behold here the sinner Thou art seeking after. For Thy part, O my God, at the moment Thou seest me fall behold me, as, by Thy mercy, I hope to be one day in heaven, where I shall think only of loving Thee. When Thou beholdest

me here below Thou seest one who during thirty or forty years of life passeth not one day—nay, perhaps not one hour—without offending Thee by some fault or other. But when Thou beholdest me in Paradise, Thou beholdest a saint who passeth millions of years and ages—nay, a whole eternity—without offending Thee so much as once, and who ceaseth not each moment of this long eternity to glorify and love Thee. Look on me, then, in this state, and be not angry if Thou seest me on earth for fifty or sixty years—two or three minutes compared with eternity — subject to frailty and to many failings

CHAPTER IX

HOW TO MAKE YOUR APPLICATIONS TO GOD IN ORDINARY DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES

REMEMBER to acquit yourself of this duty ot confidence of which I speak on all occasions, when you have any difficulty that troubles you ; when you are in doubt what you ought to do ; what resolution you ought to take. Give, O God, a word in my mouth and counsel in my heart. Send forth, O my God, Thy light to direct me. By some

mark of Thy wisdom teach my soul what to answer—what I must do in my hour of difficulty and doubt. Point out to me the best and safest means to follow. Direct me in my path, and let me not go astray. Many offer me advice and counsel, but I desire to know Thy will. Give me knowledge of it. With Thy hand guide my inclinations in the way Thou dost direct, and to the choice Thou dost inspire. I cannot but act prudently and well when the splendour of Thy wisdom shines upon me to guide me in the darkness that surrounds me. When Thy light shines upon my head I shall walk securely in the midst of gloom—in a word, live in continual communication with God. Look upon Him no otherwise than as a powerful and faithful friend, who night and day is by your side. Have with Him, as I have said, the most free and loving familiarity, confiding all your doubts and fears to Him. Disclose to Him your hidden weaknesses, your thoughts and your desires, your irresolution, and your secret troubles. Before Thee, O God, is all my desire, and my groans are not hidden from Thee.

CHAPTER X

HE IS NOT DISPLEASED WHEN WE COMPLAIN TO HIM OF HIMSELF. IN WHAT MANNER WE MAY DO IT

God is so well pleased that you should speak to Him in a familiar and friendly manner that, though you should have a mind now and then even to complain of His own Providence and of the severity wherewith He seems to treat you, He will not be angry, provided it be done in a loving and respectful way. When you are overwhelmed with grief, and can get no answer to your prayers, you may imitate our Blessed Saviour on the cross, and lovingly cry out unto Him : *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?* You may say with David : *Why, O Lord, hast Thou gone from me, and dost despise me in the time of trouble?* How comes it, O my God, that Thou knowest me not when I weep, and withdrawest Thyself from me when I am bathed in tears and do most need Thy comfort and Thy helping hand? I cry unto Thee, and Thou hearest me not. I stand before Thee, and Thou beholdest me not. Thou art changed, and become cruel towards me. Where art Thou,

O my Divine Saviour? Where is Thy mercy? Where Thy love? I call Thee, and Thou answerest me not. I cry out as loud as I am able, and Thou dost not hear me. I make known the grief that oppresses me and the unhappy state I am in, and Thou turnest Thy face from me, and wilt not behold me.

But, after such pious complainings, fail not to return to your sentiments of confidence and humility. Yet, O Lord, Thou dost not stretch out Thy hand to consume me. Though, Omnipotent God, Thou art angry, yet I perceive that Thy will is not to destroy me; the blows I receive from Thy hands are meant in kindness, and presage my happiness. Thy goodness is the cause of my suffering. The more I suffer, the more I am assured of Thy love, and that Thy Providence hath secret thoughts and designs of love towards me which, when I least expect it, will comfort me in a manner surpassing all my desires. Behold, Thou art our God; we expected Thee, and Thou shalt save us; we waited, and we shall exult and rejoice in Thy salvation.

CHAPLER XI

WE ARE TO REPRESENT THE AFFLICTIONS OF OTHERS TO GOD AS WELL AS OUR OWN

You do well to think of your own troubles and afflictions when you are in His presence, but think also of what others suffer. Give Him tidings of those you know, and seek to obtain some grace and mercy from His heart for the comfort of such as, according to the Prophet, are nourished on earth with the bread of tears. Their misery is their ordinary topic of conversation. They talk and make complaint of it in all company and in every place, but their complaints profit them little. You will do them a great service, devout soul, if in your familiar entertainments you make their afflictions known and recount them to God. In truth, my dear Master, I can go nowhere without finding tears, and from the time I knew and began to converse with men, I have scarce known one without a complaint and whom I have not beheld shedding tears of grief. It seems to me that I am born only to behold afflictions and afflicted people, and to behold them with a

seeming cruelty, not being able to help them.

This want of power, O my God, is indeed one of the saddest afflictions I suffer in this miserable life as often as I see creatures belonging to Thee, and dear to Thee, come and with tears bewail their misfortunes before my eyes, and I am forced to abandon them, as others do, and say to them: Expect nothing from me, for I am utterly unable to help you.

I speak with all sincerity when I say that for these thirty or forty years every day I have beheld sad objects of compassion, but I remember not to have been able to make one of them happy or to send him away with the comfort he desired. It would be, my dear Spouse, an enormous crime and a sign of detestable hardness of heart to be insensible of their sufferings; but it is a great misery to behold them and yet be unable to alleviate them at all. Many holy persons go to the rich and prosperous in the world to beg charity and to gather alms for the sick and shamefaced poor whom they know. I do the same, and at this present moment I, who speak to Thee, seek help and comfort for them. But it is to Thee, my Beloved, that I address myself. Thou hast Thy hands

filled with the blessings and consolations they need. I hold out my hands to receive them. In lowly adoration I cast myself at Thy feet. Suffer me not, my God, to rise without obtaining some favour for them. Send Thine elect to bear Thy charities to them, or to speak to them words of consolation that may draw them out of the abyss of sadness in which they lie, and make them rejoice again.

O my God, I am under infinite and everlasting obligations to Thee. Thou knowest that my heart is continually yearning to make grateful returns for Thy favours, according to the words of the Royal Prophet: *What shall I return unto the Lord for all His benefits bestowed upon me?* And Thy ordinary answer to me is: that whatsoever I do to anyone in affliction Thou takest it as done to Thyself, and dost retain as grateful a remembrance of it as if the affliction was Thine own, and as if Thou alone receivedst the consolation. Bestow upon me, therefore, what Thou wouldst have me give, and let me not any longer be so unhappy as to see my God afflicted and suffering all the miseries the poor and sick and prisoners undergo, and not be able to help and comfort Him.

My dear Creator, Thou sayest unto me:

Behold thy brother, thy sister, that languish upon straw and need assistance. Behold others suffering sadness and despair who call upon you to help them. And I reply in tears: O my God, give what Thou commandest me to do, and command what Thou pleasest.

CHAPTER XII

WE ARE TO HAVE RECOURSE TO GOD NO LESS IN PROSPERITY THAN IN ADVERSITY

It is common enough for devout souls—nay, for almost all Christians—to have recourse and speak to God in their afflictions, and to pass whole hours with Him in time of trouble; but it is quite as common a thing for them to forget their duty in time of prosperity. Forget not yours, O faithful Sunamitess, and do not imitate the examples of ingratitude which appear in the lives of most men, and even, perhaps, of some of your companions, how spiritual and scrupulous soever they may seem to be in other respects.

It is a strange thing that, when our undertakings prosper, and we are happy, one of our greatest joys is to acquaint our friends with it. Yet notwithstanding, as devout as we

are, we neglect to tell God, and thereby to receive the most sweet and holy comfort that can be drawn out of the happiness of this miserable life—that is, to entertain ourselves with our loving Benefactor, and to testify to Him our sense and grateful acknowledgment of His favours.

You who love your duty, testify yours after the most faithful and sincere manner you are able. Give Him an account of the happy state of your affairs, of the success of your labour, and of your conduct, when enlightened by His charity.

Tell Him everything, as the Sunamitess did. Lead Him to where your treasures are. Show Him all that you possess through the greatness of His liberality and goodness to you. *My Beloved*, says she, *behold here the fruits at our gates and within our enclosures. Wheresoever I cast my eyes I see nothing but abundance and fruitfulness, and the branches charged with Thy blessings and presents. What sweetness, my dear Spouse! What a plenty hast Thou poured down upon our fruit-trees! What riches are heaped together by Thy providence and love! Thou didst make the corn and fruit to grow, and art the cause of the plentiful harvest of our neighbouring fields. Thou art the Inventor and Origin of*

this multitude of good things that sustain our life and comfort us here below.

I accept them only that I may give them back to Thee; for, in return for temporal benefits, we ought never to cease to praise Thee and to love Thee. The use of them, because Thou wilt have it so, shall be for us, but the honour and love for Thee alone. Therefore will I say: *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name be all honour and glory.* The glory of such great prosperity is due to God alone. Neither my hands nor those of any creature have produced it, and therefore none shall share in His praise and love. I owe nothing to anyone but to Him. Nay, I will not even love His gifts and liberalities, precious as they are; for I ought to receive and possess the gifts, but to love nothing but the Giver.

Thou, my God, Who knowest all things, knowest that it is not Thy presents which make me happy. I have told Thee a thousand times what I now repeat: that amidst all the riches, all the felicities, all the worlds Thou canst create, there is nothing that I can or will love but Thee. My love is Thine alone. Thou alone shalt be eternally the God of my heart and mine everlasting inheritance.

CHAPTER XIII

OUR IMPERFECTIONS IN OUR DEVOTIONS OUGHT NOT TO HINDER A CONFIDENT RECOURSE TO HIM

APPLY yourself with particular care to speak to Him most familiarly and freely when that happens to you which is but too common in the exercises of a devout life—to wit, when you find in your soul certain negligences and discouragements, such as spiritual tediousness, wearisomeness, and disgust, of which you know not the cause, and of which David complained when he said: *My soul is dried up within me.* I cannot tell Thee, O my God, how I am, and in what condition I find myself. My soul is much out of order. It relishes nothing; nothing pleases it—nay, it is as displeasing to itself as other things are to it. It even seems as if Thou wert no longer pleasing to it, or at least I cannot bring it at present to make so much as one act of love or adoration. I say my prayers without devotion and with a shameful negligence. I cannot keep myself in Thy Divine presence with the duty and respect I ought, nor am I able to shake off a feeling of drowsi-

ness and indolence that even makes me sleep at Thy feet instead of hearkening to Thee. As David said: *My soul out of tediousness even slept within me.*

I know not whence this humour doth proceed; but I know it is displeasing to Thee, and offends Thee, and Thou knowest that it is displeasing to me also, and that it is a great pain and humiliation to me to find myself in this condition. But what comforts me is that in Thy words Thou carriest my cure. If Thou hast compassion on my infirmity, speak, and I shall be healed. Strengthen me by Thy words. Remember, O admirable Omnipotence, that of myself I am nothing but weakness and misery. All my strength depends on Thy lips and proceeds from Thine eyes. Look upon me, O Divine Redeemer, and speak only a word. Life, courage, grace will enter with Thy words, and give a new birth to my soul, which is truly entombed when thus asleep, and in a manner buried in its body by sloth. *My soul slept out of sloth; confirm me in Thy words*, said the Royal Prophet.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW MULTIPLICITY OF BUSINESS IS NO HINDRANCE TO THIS CONVERSATION

OTHER times and seasons come, very different from these, but no less troublesome and as contrary to the design you ought to have of keeping your soul always in peace and in the presence of God, and never permitting it to be carried away from Him, either by disquiet or distraction. For example, a multiplicity of affairs obliges us, as it did St. Martha, to deprive ourselves of St. Mary Magdalene's happiness, and to run to and fro, and cast our eyes and thoughts in every corner of the house, and busy ourselves with an infinitude of things. For how is it possible at such a time, when our minds are taken up and filled with many cares, to remain at the feet of our Saviour and enjoy the sweetness and consolation of His society? Yet, devout soul, it is possible. Without a doubt you may do it as easily as the Sunamitess, who sets an example that is very sweet and easy to follow in the midst of your affairs and the multitude of your domestic employments.

Observe what she doth, and you will con-

fess that it is an unexcusable error to believe that the business you are employed in by duty and God's command should constrain you to forget yourself or God. For if, when you are busily engaged, your actions do not hinder you from speaking of your employment to the persons you deal withal, why should they hinder you from speaking to Him you love, or from doing as the industrious spouse did when she had to give orders to the great number of her servants, and by her vigilance keep them assiduous in their work? Behold her, I say, and judge whether the repose of a contemplative be more agreeable than this her holy and active life. *Let us rise*, says she, *and go to the vineyards. Let us see whether the vines have flowered, and if the flowers bring forth fruit; whether the peaches have budded.* My dear Master, it is time for me to set about my work, but do not leave me alone in the midst of my labours. I fear them not, how great soever they are, so they separate me not from Thee; and Thou keepest my eyes and my thoughts fixed upon Thy presence. Let us go together and take a walk about our close. Let us go to the vineyards and see in what state they are, and whether they are advanced as they ought to be in so favour-

able a season. Let us visit our nursery and see whether the trees are prospering and our plants thriving. Let us repair to our farm and see whether the labourers mind their work; whether the shepherds are vigilant, and the servants and officers do their duty. Let us issue our orders that each one take care of his work and be employed as he ought. One thing more, my Beloved: do not leave me, for nothing can be troublesome or difficult whilst Thou art present to my mind, and whilst I hearken to Thy voice. Speak to my soul whilst my body is employed in Thy service, and in directing those whom Thou art pleased to confide to my care and guidance. When at work we speak to God of what we do, the work is no longer a distraction, but a prayer of great merit. Devout Martha, who thinks of temporal affairs, and has all the cares of the household upon her, is not disturbed, but rather comforted, by complaining to our Saviour, and making everything that happens an occasion of speaking to Him, ever telling Him that it is for Him she works, and that she is glad to labour and tire herself out whilst He beholds her. If amid the multitude of your employments you say to our Lord, as you would say to others, that

you are overwhelmed by them; and if you communicate to Him with confidence such thoughts as this turmoil occasions, all your distractions will immediately be changed into so many acts of Divine love. The contemplative Magdalenes may perhaps have more sweetness, but they cannot have more merit. A soul that withdraws not herself from God whilst she walks along the streets is far better than she that lets her thoughts wander whilst she is at prayer.

CHAPTER XV

THE GREATER FAMILIARITY YOU USE WITH GOD, THE MORE PLEASING IT IS TO HIM

IN fine, speak to Him of all things that you speak of to yourself, and do it after such a manner as love shall suggest.

Imprint at least this maxim deeply in your heart: that, as there is no master whom you ought to fear and respect as you do God, so you have not a friend—be it brother or sister—to whom you may speak with the liberty and confidence wherewith you may speak to Him. They who imagine freedom of speech with God to be against the law of

worship and submission due to His Divine Majesty are very much deceived.

Many are apt to believe that what spiritual writers say on this point are only thoughts of their simplicity, contrary to serious and solid piety, and to that holy doctrine which condemns as illusions and irreverence all those pretended confidences and seemingly bold and presumptuous conversations with God; affirming that we are in His sight but dust and ashes, and that in His presence only thoughts of profound humility and annihilation, and devotions tending thereunto, are to take place.

But alas! how feeble and weak do these pretended devotees show themselves, whilst they think they are speaking very wisely! They little understand in what the greatness of God consists, and are far from conceiving that mortal and earthly greatness is very small and inconsiderable, and infinitely less than that of God, because it knows not how to condescend to little things when wisdom and love require it to do so. Remember that the immensity of God infinitely surpasses other immensities, and that it alone is divine and sovereign, because, whilst it is of greater extent than the world, it is also as little as the least creature, and is as entirely

in a little flower as in the whole universe and in the empyrean heaven; Πλεῖον καὶ σύμμετρον, says a holy Father of Him—*God is greater than all, and equal to all.*

Meditate but a little, devout soul, on this truth, and by it you will clearly discern that God is the most amiable and lovely of all those whom you love and who love you, and that He is the true and only object of love, because in Him alone you will find the two things essential to love—to wit, superiority and equality—that is, a great infinity which elevates Him above you, and an infinite Goodness which lowers Him (if I may so say) to an equality with you, in order that all His perfections and powers may, as it were, be able to enter into your heart and render you infinitely and eternally happy. He alone is your Master and your equal, and therefore you may truly say of Him: *My Beloved to me, and I to Him.* Notwithstanding that He is God, and I am nothing, yet by an ineffable mystery He is fit for me, and I for Him. His wisdom has taken my littleness upon Him, and rendered it capable, after some manner, of containing His immensity.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN PARTICULAR REVERENCE IS TO BE SHOWN

WHEREFORE, O holy Sunamitess, in the Church and in times of adoration and divine mysteries, appear not in His presence but as an annihilated shadow with profound humility. But in the places and at the times I have spoken of, and during your solitary and familiar conversations, you are both to blame, and are ungrateful if you have not the liberty, familiarity, and tenderness that you ought to have for a Spouse He tenderly loves, and at such times speaks no other language but that of tenderness and love.

It is then He calls you His beloved, His unspotted dove, and forbids you to call Him Lord and Master. *Call me*, saith He, *the God of your heart, the Father of the mercies you expect, the Beloved of your hopes and desires, the most Lovely, the most Perfect, your All and your Only One, whose heart is one with yours, and whose grace enters into your soul, to be its life, never to be separated from it, commanding you not to call Him hereafter Lord, but to call Him Spouse.*

Thy glorious annihilations bring along with them !

Hereupon call to mind such thoughts as occurred during your meditations, or those you have read in books or heard in sermons. Recount them as things you cannot forbear speaking of or meditating upon, and mingle them with acts of love, thanksgiving, admiration, and faith. I believe the inestimable mysteries which Thy Church and Gospel teach. I have believed them ever since my birth ; and I say every day, and will say to the hour of my death, that Jesus Christ crucified is my Lord and my God. This is the first word they taught me in my cradle, and I hope it will be the last I shall pronounce as I go out of the world, and that I shall have it engraved upon my heart when I go to appear in judgment—*My Lord and my God.*

CHAPTER XIX

HOW TO CONVERSE WITH GOD CONCERNING THE SINS OF OUR PAST LIFE

TELL Him with devotion that upon the cross you no less clearly behold your own humiliations and the iniquities of your life

than the exaltations of the justice and goodness of God.

During these conversations with our Saviour you ought not to fail to entertain Him with the sins and miseries of your youth. Speak of them to this dear Spouse; and though in your former days of penance you forgot not to tell him all you knew, yet be not afraid to importune Him by humbling yourself in repeating the same things. Tell Him the whole story of those unhappy years and all the sad occasions of offending Him into which your companions led you. Remember each fault. Sigh and lament it with tears, and make acts of contrition worthy of the graces which the death of your Spouse hath merited, and which have snatched you from hell. What displeases me most of all, my Beloved, and sorely afflicts me in my many and grievous sins, is that my heart is too weak to conceive an adequate hatred for them. Alas! that my heart and the heart of my confessor, who hath known and deplored them, should be touched by them is very little. Would that I had the hearts of all men and angels, and with them all were able to conceive such a hatred and detestation as might equal my sadness and misery! O Lord, exert Thy

still remembers them? How can I be comforted by what Thou daily tellest me—that my sins are washed away in the blood Thou didst shed for us, so long as I know they still appear in Thy sight, and will do so for eternity, and that, amid the splendours of Paradise, the age of my ingratitude will be an eternal object? *Thou hast put our sins in Thy sight, our age in the light of Thy countenance.*

God, Who beholds with joy the holy fears and anxieties of your mind, is ready to bestow upon you abundant consolation. And when, in these familiar entertainments, He comforts you concerning them, He speaks as One Who, by an ineffable miracle, hath so far extended His power as to hide all in oblivion. He hath buried the memory of your sins in such an abyss that they will never emerge from it again. He will take away our iniquities, and will cast our sins into the depth of the sea, because He will have mercy

CHAPTER XX

IN WHAT MANNER WE ARE TO TREAT WITH GOD IN SCRUPLES AND FEARS OF OUR SALVATION, OR ANYTHING ELSE

BUT if, peradventure, that should happen to you which often does even to most innocent souls—to be troubled from a fear that some hidden sin still lurks in your conscience, or that God is angry with you, and has a design of reprobation against you—as soon as such a thought arises, fail not to enter into yourself, and be angry and reprove yourself for this disquiet, as a fault more hateful, perhaps, to His wisdom and mercy than all the sins you have committed. Be ashamed of it, and resist it as a blast from hell, and speak of it to your Spouse with abomination and horror, detesting such a blind and criminal diffidence. In regard, also, to those weaknesses which make you fear the power of men or devils—forming in your imagination scruples and vain ideas which torment you exceedingly, and excite in your soul inclinations to despair—take care you permit not yourself to be dejected by this temptation of the enemy. Open your eyes and behold how

wonderful favours you have received from God, and the main occasions you can recall when He manifested His particular goodness towards you. Repeat them all to Him, and remember there are three histories which your Spouse very willingly hears, and which you can never repeat too often. Make them, therefore, the ordinary topic of your familiar entertainments. They are: the history of your sinful life; the history of your redemption, and of His death for you on Mount Calvary; and the history of all His dealings with you, and of the miraculous aid you have received from His providence on the many occasions when you were in danger of perishing, as well as at this very hour when you are speaking to Him. For, if He had not had pity on you and heard your voice in the time of your peril, you would have been lost for all eternity. Thou, O my God, didst stretch forth Thy hand and draw me out of the depths of sin and misery. Thou didst dry up my tears, and break my chains asunder. Pardon Thou mine ingratitude, and heal all mine infirmities, Who hast given me health, hope, and grace; hast crowned me with blessings, and heaped benefits upon me; and hast revealed to me the secrets of Thy wisdom and the sublime

truths of Thy Gospel; and from the wretched state I was in—which had brought me to the gates of hell, and into the power of the devil—hast exalted me to the rank and condition of angels. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not His benefits. In fine, speak to Him of all things that occur to you, and with all the intimate familiarity which one friend can have with another. Fear nothing so much as to be afraid or tremble in His presence; for nothing so displeaseth Him in His saints as a want of confidence, and the disquiet of a fearful and pusillanimous soul.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW GOD, WHILST WE SPEAK TO HIM, SILENTLY SPEAKS TO OUR HEARTS

THAT which is most advantageous in these conversations with God is that, though it seems that so long as you entertain Him He lets you speak without speaking Himself, nevertheless it is not so.

There is a certain voice which is proper only to Himself, and which, without the knowledge of your interior faculties, whilst your imagination understands nothing, breathes in

your soul such verities as His love would have you know. Imperceptibly there rise in your mind thoughts that comfort you and extinguish your fears, lights that dissipate your doubts and apprehensions, and reflections that make known to you what you are to do, and teach you a safe and sure way to happily regulate all your designs.

It is much that He even gives ear to you. But when you speak to Him with respectful confidence, He cannot forbear to answer and to comfort you. He does it not by human words, but by infusing His lights, His thoughts, His sweetnesses into your heart. It is His heart which speaketh to His spouses, and it is a language they understand.

THE END

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